

The last word Marxist film criticism

by the Editors

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With this issue JUMP CUT completes its first year of publication. Since anniversaries are times for looking ahead, we'd like to indicate some of the areas we want to examine in the next year and beyond. We announced in our first editorial that JUMP CUT was committed to examining film in "its social and political context." In other editorials we indicated some of our basic areas of interest, and why we believe they are important: Hollywood (JUMP CUT 2), independent political filmmaking (JUMP CUT 3), and structuralism and semiology as important critical methodologies with Marxism as a basic foundation (JUMP CUT 4) To further our project of developing radical film criticism, we expect to present major articles in the coming year in the following areas.

THE INSTITUTIONAL NATURE OF FILM IN SOCIETY. The vast bulk of film discussion goes on without recognizing the film industry as industry, as show business. In part, this omission derives from the artificial split bourgeois education and criticism makes between aesthetics and the social, economic, and political context in which art is created. But film always comes to us from and is heavily influenced by, even if not obviously determined by, the commercial and institutional structures that produce it. This ranges from film financing and production, marketing, distribution and exhibition, to censorship and self-censorship. The institutions involved range from international conglomerate corporations to small commercial labs, from the American Film Institute to local film clubs. How those institutions influence the films we see and how we see and discuss them needs to be thoroughly examined.

RADICAL CULTURAL AND AESTHETIC ANALYSES. The examination and discussion of film and its relation to aesthetics demands a sophisticated analysis based on the Marxist conception of culture,

society, and history. There has been an explosion of knowledge, theories, and discussion of this problem, particularly in Europe in an atmosphere of vigorous controversy. We want to distill from these insights—into the functioning of bourgeois culture and into the possibilities for an activist intervention in that culture—those theories and analyses which will help people in the United States come to a better understanding of film art, culture, and society, and ways of changing all three. Such a project must include an integral understanding of U.S. struggles in the last decade against capitalism, sexism, racism, and imperialism.

This effort is clearly interdisciplinary and needs contributions from all kinds of cultural workers: filmmakers, film critics and scholars, political economists, popular culture students, cultural historians, anthropologists, and many others. We hope and intend that our reviews, articles, dialogues, editorials, notes, and even exchange ads will make JUMP CUT a medium of fruitful exchange for radical cultural workers. We want to bridge the usual gaps between filmmakers and critics, between critics and scholars, between academics and other cultural workers, between film people and other students of culture and society. Equally we see the need for a close mutual relation between cultural workers and the struggles for liberation of workers, women, gays and lesbians, oppressed racial and ethnic groups, and anti-imperialist forces throughout the world.

FILM AND IDEOLOGY. One of the central problems we are concentrating on is the complex notion of ideology. We are, as Marx said, dominated by ideas which bear no accurate relation to the reality we live, It is in the interest of those few who profit from the status quo to mystify our awareness, to keep people ignorant of the real relations which exist in our society, to keep power from people. Film functions, most of the time, to maintain the current social order. Thus the task of radical cultural workers is to raise consciousness, to provide the intellectual tools for struggle against all forms of exploitation and oppression.

Unlike the majority of film periodicals, JUMP CUT is not devoted to publishing the conventional “best” of what is being written about film, for we are committed to challenging and changing the way things are. Nor are we interested in building circulation with artificial controversy and superficial ideas and modish writing styles. We think the quality of JUMP CUT and its liveliness has come and will come from an active engagement with the crucial issues and ideas raised by film in our time. JUMP CUT has been and will be a work-in-progress, a process, a project, aimed at developing an active radical film criticism.

